



RCD Outlook 2002

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Building Effective Partnerships in Lake County

Throughout California, Resource Conservation Districts (RCD) are reaching out to their communities and building effective partnerships. Relationship building is time consuming, intensive, and very difficult, but necessary. It can only be accomplished by RCD Directors and employees who are willing to invest both time and energy into building these critical relationships, necessary for long term and sustained growth. Both the West Lake and East Lake RCDs have been successful in building partnerships with many diverse groups within their communities. Leading the charge is Greg Dills, Watershed Coordinator.

Over the past four years, his efforts have been instrumental in moving both Districts forward. Recognizing the need for local involvement, Greg has spent countless hours cultivating these relationships by attending meetings, participating in local projects, and actively promoting District goals. His impact has been significant. Within the Districts' sphere of influence, seven Coordinated Resource Management and Planning (CRMP) groups have been formed and are actively engaged in their communities. Greg participates in all of them. Not only does he attend meetings, but he also participates in planning and implementing projects. Both Districts have been responsible for numerous projects throughout Lake County. Many of the projects rely extensively on public and private participation. The Districts are involved in a diversity of projects that address important local issues.

South Cow Mountain is a prime example of an area that is confronting multiple issues simultaneously. Recently a new machine called the "brush masticator" was used to clear brush to reduce wild fire dangers. Greg also worked with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to construct a bridge over Panther Creek to prevent off road vehicles from crossing streams and contributing to stream bank erosion. This was a formidable task considering that portions of the bridge had to be flown in by helicopter because of the remote location

where the bridge was built. Throughout the area, restoration projects were implemented to reduce erosion. Stream banks were stabilized, willows planted, and weirs strategically placed to prevent unnecessary habitat loss.



Scotts Creek Cleanup

Another issue – invasive weeds – has been thrust to the forefront as more and more acreage is affected by these uninvited guests. Mobilizing an army of volunteers, the Districts in cooperation with the local CRMPs and the newly formed Lake County Weed

Management Area have recently launched an offensive against *Arundo donax* (giant reed). The plant grows extremely fast, provides tremendous fuel for fires, reduces animal habitat, and uses a lot of water. The county is understandably concerned. In Southern California, the

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Help! We Need A Plan (part I)

Your RCD has decided that it would be a good idea to apply for a Department of Conservation grant. As you read the request for grant applications you realize that your RCD meets almost all the eligibility requirements. Unfortunately, the RCD does not have a current annual or long range plan. Someone handed you a copy of a plan when you started but you have a vague recollection that it was dated 1972. Thinking it might be a good idea to update the plan, you start researching the “strategic planning” process you have heard so much about.

Fortunately, there are a lot of planning resources available. For example, the RCD Guidebook and the RCD Director’s Handbook both have sections devoted to planning. The CA Department of Finance also has Strategic Planning Guidelines available on their website (<http://www.dof.ca.gov/FISA/fisa.htm>).

“Strategic Planning is more than filling out forms, or compiling a document. Most of the value of strategic planning is realized in the process of planning itself.” Ca Dept. of Finance, 1998

The National Association of Conservation Districts also offers information on strategic planning. Of course, it’s always a good idea to talk to other RCDs who may have been through the process. Sometimes they are the best source of information. Oh, and don’t forget about your friendly DOC RCD Assistance Program staff. They are always ready and willing to help.

From just a little research you learn about many of the benefits of having a strategic plan (outside of being eligible for a grant from DOC, of course). First, the RCD will develop a consensus on where they are now, where they want to go, and the best way to get there. Second, having a mission, goals, and objectives that everyone in the RCD fully supports can help the RCD identify partners with common interests. Working with partners can reduce duplication of efforts, help everyone reach common goals more efficiently, and increase an RCD’s visibility in the community. Another benefit of the strategic planning process is the resulting organizational assessment. Strategic planning requires districts to assess their current strengths and weaknesses so they can capitalize on their strengths and improve on their weaknesses. Finally, the most important benefit of strategic planning is that it enables an RCD to set priorities and focus limited resources in those areas.

Realizing that your RCD could really benefit from creating a strategic plan, you decide to get started. The first step is to figure out who will be involved. Ideally the planning team should include all of the district directors, the staff, and representatives of key partners, such as NRCS. It is important that the plan is accepted and supported by all those who work with the RCD on a regular basis. Involving everyone from the beginning will increase the likelihood of the plan’s success. In general, a plan that is developed solely by an employee or by just a few directors is less likely to be effective. Later on in the planning process it may be important to solicit input from others in the community. It’s important to note there is no standard amount of time that it takes to develop a plan. It will depend on the needs of your district. However, those involved should be willing to

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My Project Needs A Permit So What's Next?

You've got a small bank erosion problem that you want to deal with so you propose to do some grading and realignment of the stream bank, and then install a small amount of hard surfacing mixed with some vegetative applications to help keep things in place. You've met with your local planning department and been advised that a special development permit must first be obtained and that a grading permit from Building and Safety may also be required. You're also advised that the state Department of Fish and Game will require a stream alteration agreement and that you will also need to check with the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding permits they might require.

Yikes! News like that might cause some people to scurry back home and forget about the whole thing...but not you. So what can you expect? The first step is to complete the permit application and provide the necessary maps, plot plans, and other information requested by the planning department. Most of the "fill in the blank" stuff can probably be done at home, but you may need help with the plot plan (some departments require professionally prepared plans). If that's the case, check with the local NRCS office to see if they can be of assistance. You should also count on having to submit a biological survey of the stream course, but check with the planning department before you have one done. Survey protocols and the time of year are important factors with this task.

Once the planning department has accepted your application as complete, it will notify you of its action (usually with a postcard). This notification starts the clock ticking for the review process. Since a local permit is needed, the planning department becomes the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for your project. Both the Permit Streamlining Act (PSA) and CEQA mandate strict time limits that a lead agency must follow when reviewing a project. Under CEQA, the lead agency must decide whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or a Negative Declaration within 30 days of accepting an application. If a Negative Declaration, the environmental review process must be completed within 180 days of application acceptance. An EIR must be completed within one year of that date. The PSA requires the lead agency to approve or disapprove the project within 60 days of the adoption of a Negative Declaration or determination that a project is exempt, and within 180 days from the date of certification of an EIR.

In practice, lead agencies determine if your project is subject to CEQA (most are) during the application submittal process. In our example, the fact that work is proposed in a stream course pretty much guarantees that an environmental review is required. This process requires circulation of a project description and supporting documents followed by a public review and comment period. When combined with other permit review issues, the whole process will require about four to five months to complete for a small project like ours. This estimate of time assumes that the lead agency makes a negative declaration or mitigated negative declaration determination in the project initial study. We'll discuss what these terms mean in the next edition.

Written by Andrew Rush, Environmental Specialist

Lake County Partnerships (continued from page 1)



plant has taken hold and in some places requires aerial spraying by helicopter. The RCD is working diligently with its partners to prevent the same from happening in Lake County. Greg is optimistic that this coalition of public and private stakeholders can prevail.

Both RCDs are very effective in mobilizing volunteers. Recently, more than 50 volunteers from numerous groups including the Boy Scouts, 4H, local Tribes, local landowners and others removed more than 60 cubic yards of trash, recyclables, dozens of appliances, 142 tires and two abandoned earthmovers. The project targeted six creeks within Lake County. Another group of volunteers was used to develop a water quality monitoring program in the upper tributaries of Cache Creek. The volunteers will collect data from six new monitoring sites. The Districts also rely extensively on volunteers to staff booths at local fairs and other outreach forums. Both districts have been successful in using volunteers to complete local projects and to address the needs of the community.

East Lake and West Lake RCDs have reached deep within their communities and made a profound difference. Professional staff and dedicated Directors have been instrumental in developing effective partnerships. As a result, the RCDs continue to grow and expand.

Clearly, both organizations have demonstrated the affect that a “grass roots”, locally led organization can have on a community. Although many challenges remain, both districts are optimistic that no challenge is insurmountable. With their partners, they will persevere and thrive.

Written by Robert Shun, Grant Coordinator

Planning (Continued from page 2)

devote as much time as necessary to the process.

Before you get to the actual planning, it is important to answer the question, “where are we now”. An effective way to do this is through an internal and external assessment. During this phase the RCD should look at all the internal strengths and weaknesses of the district and identify any opportunities for change. The RCD should also look at the external environment and determine what external elements may affect the way the district does business. For example, a bill making its way through the legislature that would require RCDs to change the way they operate, would be considered an external element. The district should do their best to identify all external factors that could have an impact on the district during this phase. The district will always benefit from being aware of threats and opportunities in their external environment.

The next important step is to develop a clear mission statement. This may have been done in the past, but it’s a good idea to revisit it from time to time. The mission statement is a broad, comprehensive statement that conveys the unique reason a district exists. All of the activities the district chooses to embark on should fit within this mission statement. While this may seem like a small portion of the planning process, the mission statement is one of the plan’s most important elements. Developing the mission statement can help all those involved with the RCD develop a collective understanding of goals the RCD should pursue.

In the next newsletter, we will discuss other elements of a strategic plan such as, the vision, goals and objectives.

Written by Jenny Pickel, Resource Specialist

Farm Bill Forums

In cooperation with CARCD, NRCS will be conducting farm bill forums throughout the state during November and December. NRCS will share information about new farm bill programs in California and discuss how best to get the work done. CARCD will send out specific information when arrangements are finalized. However, the forums are tentatively scheduled for:

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|-------------|-----------------|
| November 20 | Auburn |
| November 21 | Colusa |
| November 22 | Anderson |
| November 25 | Salinas |
| November 26 | Barstow |
| December 2 | Susanville |

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|-------------|-----------------|
| December 3 | Clovis |
| December 4 | Stockton |
| December 9 | Escondido |
| December 10 | El Centro |
| December 11 | Ventura |

*Additional workshops will be held in other parts of the state during the week of December 16th.

Department of Conservation

801 K Street, MS 13-71
Sacramento CA 95814

Phone: 916-324-0774

Fax: 916-327-3430

Email: rcd@consvr.ca.gov



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Edited by: Jenny Pickel

The RCD Outlook newsletter is intended to provide RCDs with helpful tips and updates on RCD work statewide. If you would like to be added to the mailing list please feel free to call the RCD program staff at 916-324-0774 or send an email to rcd@consvr.ca.gov.